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## Control Uncertain

# Heavy Sandinista Drive Seeks to Recapture Port

By Edward Cody  
Washington Post Foreign Service

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, April 18—Nicaraguan government forces are using boats, planes and ground troops to pound the ramshackle Caribbean port near the Costa Rican border that anti-Sandinista rebels took last week, according to reports reaching here.

Both the government and the rebels claimed control of the town today following the government's heavy counteroffensive, which began yesterday. The capture Friday of San Juan del Norte, 10 miles north of the border, provided the anti-Sandinista forces loyal to Eden Pastora with a major propaganda victory as they became the first antigovernment guerrillas to capture and hold a Nicaraguan town. Pastora has left the besieged town, officials from his organization said.

The seizure lifted Pastora's Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE) out of the shadow cast by the Honduras-based Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the larger, more active and better financed of the two groups fighting to overthrow the Sandinista government in Managua.

Pastora's success, although it may prove only temporary, already has

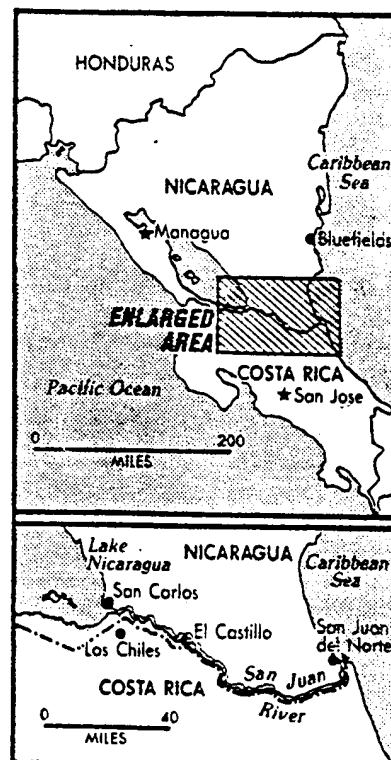
provided the mercurial guerrilla commander with a platform from which to seek more and better funding for his year-old campaign. According to knowledgeable sources here, it was made possible by a recent infusion of arms and money that rescued his forces from severe economic straits.

The town lies in jungle terrain that makes overland access difficult for Sandinista soldiers from Managua, more than 200 miles to the northwest, or Bluefields, the closest city 70 miles north on the Atlantic coast. Its 600 families fled four months ago, leaving fewer than 100 Sandinista militamen to defend it.

Nicaraguan Defense Minister Humberto Ortega, who acknowledged the town's capture Sunday, underlined its isolation and lack of value as an economic or strategic target. But capturing San Juan del Norte and holding it, even for five days, still represented a significant symbolic advance for Pastora's guerrillas.

Pastora boasted that he will within three months set up a provisional government headed by Alfonso Robelo, the political chief of the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance and a former Sandinista junta member.

Whatever the chances of actually



By Richard Furno—The Washington Post

taking that step, Pastora's stay in San Juan del Norte put him a propaganda step ahead of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. Despite its financing by the CIA and its sustained attacks in northern Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force has yet to capture and hold a town.

Against that background, a spokesman for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force in Honduras asserted yesterday that his guerrillas control "more than 20,000 square kilometers" of northern Nicaraguan terri-

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